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DOI:

[10.1017/S0021875816001432](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875816001432)

*Document Version*

Peer reviewed version

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*Citation for published version (APA):*

Balbier, U. (2017). The World Congress on Evangelism 1966 in Berlin: US Evangelicalism, Cultural Dominance, and Global Challenges. *Journal of American Studies*, 51(4), 1171-1196.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875816001432>

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# **The World Congress on Evangelism 1966 in Berlin: US Evangelicalism, Cultural Dominance, and Global Challenges**

Uta A. Balbier<sup>1</sup>

## **Abstract:**

This article uses the World Congress on Evangelism held in Berlin in 1966 to explore the cultural dimensions of US leadership in the world of global evangelism post-World War II. It shows how a close alliance with technology and business, as well as traditional anti-Communism and belief in Western civilization spurred US evangelicals to assume global leadership. A closer examination of the cultural and spiritual atmosphere of the Congress reveals, however, that beneath the apparent American leadership tensions emerged around race and social issues, expressed forcefully by new theological and political voices from the developing world. These tensions were negotiated through common practices and behaviours, such as during prayer session, dinner conversations, and discussions groups, and allowed a genuine transnational evangelical community to rise.

On October 31, 1966, during the World Congress on Evangelism a “March of Christian Witness” took the delegates through the heart of the divided city of Berlin from Wittenbergplatz to the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Memorial-Church. 10,000 Berliners joined the 1,200 delegates from around 100 countries who came to Berlin to spend ten days discussing questions of faith and evangelism under the core theme “One Race, One Gospel, One Task”. The congress brought together theologians, evangelists, denominational and interdenominational leaders from around the world whose march culminated at the historic ruins left by the War where they jointly sang 'A Mighty Fortress is Our God'. The coordinating director of the congress, W. Stanley Mooneyham, captured the atmosphere of the march as a truly global event: “The flags of 100 nations scattered throughout the line of marchers, the colorful national and ecclesiastical costumes worn by many delegates, the

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reception at the church by Bishop Otto Dibelius and Kurt Scharf of the Church of Berlin-Brandenburg, the Reformation sermon by Evangelist Billy Graham, even the icy rain which started to fall before the service was ended-all added to the emotional impact of what for many was the most dramatic event of the ten-day Congress on Evangelism.”<sup>2</sup>

Billy Graham’s biographer William Martin celebrated the World Congress in his 1991 publication as a watershed in the history of global evangelism: “The Berlin Congress did prove to be a pivotal event for Evangelical Christianity, helping to create a kind of third worldwide ecumenical force alongside Vatican II and the WCC and establishing Evangelicalism as an international movement capable of accomplishing more than its constituents had dreamed possible.”<sup>3</sup> And yet, in the literature on global evangelism the congress has been considered largely as a prequel to the larger and definitely more important First World Congress on World Evangelization which saw the launch of the Lausanne movement in 1974.<sup>4</sup> Despite the global atmosphere attested by participants, the academic literature described the Berlin congress as a predominantly American event. Professor of World Christianity Brian Stanley for example acknowledges on the one hand that the congress “made visible for the first time the fact that conservative evangelicalism could no longer be dismissed as a peculiarity of Anglo-American culture, but was now a vigorous religious force in all continents.”<sup>5</sup> His short treatment of the congress, on the other hand, still

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<sup>2</sup> W. Stanley Mooneyham, ‘Introduction’. In: Carl F.H. Henry and W. Stanley Mooneyham, eds., *One Race, One Gospel, One Task. World Congress on Evangelism, Berlin 1966, Official Reference Volumes: Papers and Reports* (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1967), Vol. 1 and 2, here Vol.1, 3-4. An image of the march was published on the front page of *Decision*, January 1967, 1. The international secular press also reported on the event: West Berliners and Evangelists Hold Parade, October 31, 1966, *Washington Post*, A16. The multicultural image of the march had been carefully planned and staged by the organizers. In an early Congress Bulletin, participants were encouraged to bring their national dress and costume to Berlin to “visually reflect the international character of the Congress for motion picture and television cameras (...)”. Congress Bulletin, April 12, 1966, 4. Billy Graham Center Archives (BGCA) 14-2-1.

<sup>3</sup> William Martin, *A Prophet With Honor: The Billy Graham Story* (New York, W. Morrow and Co., 1991), 337; on the congress: 325-337. See also: John Pollock, *Billy Graham. Evangelist to the World. An Authorized Biography of the Decisive Years* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1979), 187-189.

<sup>4</sup> See the article by Melani McAlister in this special issue.

<sup>5</sup> Brian Stanley, *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism. The Age of Billy Graham and John Stott* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2013), 69-70, 70.

gives most room to the American and Western organizers and their consensual vision for the future of global evangelism. Contemporary Western press reports on the event went even further highlighting the fact that the congress was run with “American efficiency” creating a “strikingly American” atmosphere.<sup>6</sup>

When one examines, however, the diverse reports by organizers and participants captured in diverse contemporary evangelical and religious journals as well as in the published conference proceedings and in the collections of the Billy Graham Centre Archives<sup>7</sup>, the atmosphere of the world congress appears to be much more complex. To be sure, the congress forcefully displayed global, hegemonic US evangelicalism, marked by its stern anti-communism, business like can-do mentality, and firm belief in its own civilizing mission. Yet at the same time, it also showed the first challenges to this cultural dominance and the emergence of a new international evangelical community in which African, Asian, and Latin American voices challenged the US role as a spiritual leader and made their own visions for the future of world evangelism heard. In the following I will use the congress as a prism to explore both aspects and show how they played out and interacted in the intense and liminal atmosphere of this ten day long international meeting.

My focus on the cultural layers of US evangelism abroad and the question of how its cultural dominance was performed at the congress adds to the burgeoning research on the international dimensions of US evangelicalism which so far has focused more on the growing international identity of the movement, its interplay with shifts in US foreign policy, and its dominance regarding funds and manpower.<sup>8</sup> It also speaks to the growing literature on the

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<sup>6</sup> Comments from the German newspaper *Die Welt* were translated and reprinted in: Evangelical Parley Denounces Liberal Protestants’ Doctrines, *New York Times*, October 29, 1966, 2.

<sup>7</sup> For an invaluable online collection of some of the conference papers, audio recordings, and photographs published by the BGCA see: <http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/berlin66.htm>

<sup>8</sup> William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Sarah Ruble, *The Gospel of Freedom and Power. Protestant Missionaries in American Culture after World War II* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 55-90; Andrew Preston, ‘Evangelical Internationalism: A Conservative Worldview for the Age of Globalization’. In Laura Jane Gifford and Daniel K. Williams, eds., *The Right Side of the Sixties: Reexamining Conservatism’s*

contemporary contours of global Christendom.<sup>9</sup> Through the Berlin congress, I attempt to historicize the first cracks that occurred in a US dominated world evangelism, arguing that what became visible in Berlin would turn into fractures at the Lausanne congress eight years later.

I approach the congress through a transnational and anthropological perspective. The world congress constituted a transnational forum in which new theological ideas formed and were canonized, in which controversies took place, and friendships formed. Here we can witness the connections, circulations, relations, and formations that the historian Pierre-Yves Saunier identified as the core features of transnational history.<sup>10</sup> The attempt to capture the culture of the congress means that we need to move its exploration beyond questions of organization and proceedings, to acknowledge the importance of space, performance, and experience, and to turn to the everyday life of discussion groups and prayer meetings as well as city tours. Such an approach is, on the one hand, inspired by anthropologically based works prominent in the field of religious studies that highlight the importance of religious practices such as prayer.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, such an approach reflects recent work on other international congresses and the formation of transnational networks in the field of religion as well as of sciences. Pierre Marage and Gregoire Wallenborn make a strong case for the important role of discussion groups, group photos, and banquets as part of the experience of congresses, in the foreword of their edited volume on the Solvay Councils and the making of

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*Decade of Transformation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 221-240. An increasingly transnational turn in the study of US evangelicalism is indicated by works such as: David D. King, 'The New Internationalists: World Vision and the Revival of American Evangelical Humanitarianism, 1950–2010'. *Religions* 2012, 3, 922-949.

<sup>9</sup> Philip Jenkins, *Next Christendom. The Coming of Global Christianity*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Mark Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> On conferences and events see esp. Pierre-Yves Saunier, *Transnational History*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 86.

<sup>11</sup> Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of the 115<sup>th</sup> Street*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth. The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars who Study them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

modern physics. They underline as well the importance of taking the broader social-political circumstances, which the councils were embedded in, into consideration.<sup>12</sup> This is also reflected in Brian Stanley's account of the world missionary conference held at Edinburgh 1910, which also highlights the importance of prayer groups, travel arrangements, and discussion groups.<sup>13</sup>

Only an approach that combines a bottom up perspective with the consideration of socio-political realities such as the Cold War or the evolving hierarchies between the West and the developing world, allows us to fully capture the narratives, beliefs, and symbols that reinforced US cultural leadership, while also recognizing those that challenged it. In this interplay emerged a new global evangelical culture which was strikingly less American, but formed instead around transnational practices and exchanges that took place before, during, and after the meeting in Berlin.

### **The American Evangelical Dream**

Global evangelism during the first decades of the Cold War was dominated by US evangelical missionaries, evangelists, and organizations founded particularly to spread the Gospel abroad. While mainline Protestant missionary engagement declined after 1945, the new evangelicalism, on the rise in post-War America, embraced missions abroad with a revived fever.<sup>14</sup> This development mirrored the general rise of the new evangelical movement in the US after 1945, which easily overtook mainline Protestantism in becoming one of the

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<sup>12</sup> Pierre Marage and Gregoire Wallenborn, eds., *The Solvay Councils and the Birth of Modern Physics*, (Bern: Birkhaeuser Verlag, 1999), VIII-X.

<sup>13</sup> Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> According to Sarah Ruble, in 1953 mainline Protestant missionaries constituted over 50 per cent of the US missionary force. By 1985, this share had dropped to 11.5 per cent. Ruble, *Gospel of Freedom and Democracy*, 20.

most important religious movements in the US in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The new evangelicals formed around preachers such as Billy Graham, theologians such as Carl Henry and Harald Ockenga, and found new administrative homes in institutions such as Fuller Theological Seminary, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA), and the National Association of Evangelicals. The movement's defining openness towards the world, its new social, cultural, and political engagement and vision, led to advanced missionary endeavours that clearly reflected the transformed identity of the evangelical milieu after 1945.<sup>15</sup>

Mirroring their dynamic and large-scale revival work at home, newly founded evangelical organizations such as Youth for Christ, World Vision, and the BGEA were keen to spread the Gospel abroad. They stood firmly in the tradition of earlier evangelical missionary movements led by Dwight L. Moody and John R. Mott. Youth for Christ even adopted the 19<sup>th</sup> century student volunteer movement's slogan to evangelize the world in this generation.<sup>16</sup> Steeped in this traditional evangelical commitment to mission abroad, their missionary work was also shaped by contemporary influences and reflected modern US Cold War culture. It was marked by a stern anti-Communism, technology and media savviness, and business-like efficiency; and it was this particular brand of US evangelicalism that the organizers brought with them to Berlin.

Billy Graham had first formulated the idea to hold a World Congress on Evangelism in 1963. Graham loyally attended the meetings of the ecumenical World Council of Churches, yet sensed that there was room for a genuinely evangelical alternative. Graham worried, in his own words, that within the World Council "the preoccupation with unity was

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<sup>15</sup> For the history, rise, and identity of the new evangelical movement in contrast to traditional Protestant Fundamentalism in the United States see: Joel Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> On earlier evangelical missionary endeavours see: Joel A. Carpenter and Wilbert R. Shenk, eds., *Earthen Vessels: American Evangelicals and Foreign Missions, 1880-1980* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990).

overshadowing a commitment to evangelism and biblical theology.”<sup>17</sup> The World Council’s emphasis on social justice and change, born out of its historic development in response to two world wars, evidently outbalanced its commitment to saving individual souls.<sup>18</sup> The evangelical movement represented by Graham clearly ranked individual salvation higher than social change; a commitment that would draw increased criticism towards the movement and lead to increasing tensions within the movement, as will be discussed later.

As much as Graham saw the World Congress being distinct from the World Council, he built on the same tradition of the Edinburgh Missionary conference held in 1910, which he referred to in his opening address.<sup>19</sup> Fifty-six years before the Berlin meeting, 1,200 representatives of Protestant missionary societies had gathered at Edinburgh, burning with missionary and ecumenical optimism, committed to new scientific approaches to mission, and enthused by the new possibilities regarding travel and communication that marked a next step in globalization.<sup>20</sup> Berlin indeed revived the spirit of Edinburgh, but it was distinct in the way it shifted the focus of the gathering from missionary commitment to evangelical rigor. This new focus was reflected early on in the invitation policy of the congress, stating that potential delegates should “be thoroughly evangelical”<sup>21</sup>.

Being afraid that Graham’s name, which stood more for evangelic charisma than theological depth, could prevent theologians from accepting invitations, he delegated the organization and leadership of the congress to Carl F.H. Henry, editor of *Christianity Today*. Soon it was agreed that the Congress should mark and celebrate the magazine’s tenth anniversary. Graham’s idea took three years to become reality, but with Henry’s

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<sup>17</sup> Billy Graham, *Just as I am* (New York: Harper One, 1997), 559.

<sup>18</sup> See W.A. Visser ‘t Hoff, *The Genesis and Formation of the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), esp. 92-93.

<sup>19</sup> Graham, *Just as I am*, 565.

<sup>20</sup> For a detailed study of the Edinburgh conference see: Stanley, *World Missionary Conference*.

<sup>21</sup> Revised Report. Meeting of Executive Committee World Congress on Evangelism, Chicago, Illinois, April 21, 1964, 1. BGCA 313 -2-36.



organizational commitment and significant financial support from the BGEA, the World Congress on Evangelism finally opened on October 25<sup>th</sup>, 1966 with Billy Graham as its honorary chairman.<sup>22</sup>

The congress was set up in many respects as an American event. It was conceptualized by an all-American organizing committee composed of several key figures in US evangelicalism, all of them closely affiliated with the BGEA. On the committee served George M. Wilson, executive vice-president of the BGEA, Walter Smyth, vice-president in charge of crusade planning in the BGEA, and Dr. Robert P. Evans, the European representative of the BGEA. Robert C. Van Kampen, a business executive and trustee of Wheaton College served as chair of the finances committee and W. Stanley Mooneyham acted as coordinating director of the congress.<sup>23</sup> The congress was also clearly dominated by Western and American speakers, even though the number of US participants had been capped at 100. Only 57 out of the 200 speakers had, according to Brian Stanley, a majority world background. Moreover, Western delegates held key positions in delivering all of the six main position papers and 17 of the 24 Bible studies.<sup>24</sup>

These numbers are important as these sessions endeavoured to define the framework for the future identity of global evangelism regarding theology, organization, and rhetoric. There was a striking agreement between all the presenters of the central position papers that the main goal of global evangelism should be personal salvation instead of social reform. The American key figures Carl Henry, Billy Graham, and Harold Ockenga defined this American evangelical core conviction as the ideological center of the congress. Henry made this clear in his introductory paper: “For good reason we repudiate the inversion of the New Testament by

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<sup>22</sup> For contemporary reports on the congress and its organization see: Carl F.H. Henry, *Confessions of a Theologian. An Autobiography* (Waco: World Books, 1986), 252-262; John Pollock, *Crusades. 20 Years with Billy Graham* (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1969), 233-239.

<sup>23</sup> The minutes of the executive committee of the World Congress on Evangelism 1964-1966 can be found in the Van Kampen Collection BGCA 313-2-36.

<sup>24</sup> Stanley, *Global Diffusion*, 70.

current emphases on the revolutionizing of social structures rather than on the regeneration of individuals; we deplore the emphasis on material more than on moral and spiritual betterment (...).<sup>25</sup> Even if other representatives were less explicit, a clear commitment to a social gospel was missing from all position papers.<sup>26</sup>

But the American representatives were not just able to set the theological tone for the Congress, they also displayed their cultural hegemony in the way the congress was organized and run. This set the Congress clearly apart from earlier conferences such as Edinburgh, which according to Dana Roberts, took place “in a Eurocentric context”.<sup>27</sup> US evangelicalism had gained its post-War strength at home from its close relationship to the world of business and popular culture, and the Berlin congress was run accordingly. From the complex selection process of the 1,200 delegates to the reservation of venues and hotel rooms, to the compiling of conference programmes and post-congress publications, the congress was indeed run with American efficiency.

In particular the organization of the delegates’ travel reflected the smooth, efficient, and ‘American’ running of the congress. It found its most striking expression in the fact, that what was considered to be *the* American airline Pan American was selected as the official airline of the World Congress.<sup>28</sup> More than seventy per cent of the delegates and member of the press corps as well as observers boarded Pan Am jets for chartered flights from New York, Chicago, London, Tokyo, and Beirut to travel together to Berlin. How fluid the boundaries between US evangelicalism and business were became obvious when the airline’s

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<sup>25</sup> Carl F.H. Henry, ‘Facing a New Day in Evangelism’. In: *One Race, One Gospel, One Task*, Vol. 1, 11-18, 16.

<sup>26</sup> For the history of a more socially concerned evangelicalism in relation to the conservative majority in the US see: Mark Thomas Edwards, *The Right of the Protestant Left: God's Totalitarianism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); David R. Swartz, *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Brantley W. Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals and the Pursuit of Social Justice* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

<sup>27</sup> Dana Roberts, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 69.

<sup>28</sup> Congress Chooses ‘Most Experienced Airline’ in: World Congress of Evangelism Prayer-News Bulletin, August-September-October 1966, 4. BGCA 14-1-6.

representative, Steward Swift, stated: “Pan American is highly honored to be chosen as the official Congress carrier.”<sup>29</sup> This was more than a lip service as Pan Am took its official carrier role seriously. The company even flew out one of the delegates, who had missed his flight in Beirut, “at no extra cost”.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to the business-like running of the Congress, the 100 American delegates established also a rather managerial can-do rhetoric that reflected the US movement’s organizational and financial strength, for example when Carl Henry in his opening remarks called the delegates present members “of an international ‘all star’ team of evangelists”.<sup>31</sup> Even more defining though was the rhetoric of planning, management, and sciences established by representatives from the American relief organization World Vision who boosted an advanced business-focused and tech-savvy vision for world evangelism.

World Vision and Fuller Theological Seminary sponsored the conference publication “That Every Man May Hear” prepared by the Mission Advanced Research and Communication Center. The around 20 page booklet promoted a modern and scientific vision for world evangelism based on research and development, planning and resources, as well as information and communication. Advocating a modern planning process for future missionary work, the authors did not hide where their inspiration came from: “The secular world has learned that tomorrow’s advances are based on today’s investment in research and development. Every organization given to the task of winning men for Jesus Christ needs to learn this lesson also.”<sup>32</sup> The booklet was illustrated with images of modern computer terminals, airplanes, and communication masts, boasting the imagery of the modern world and the new opportunities this world held for the spreading of the Gospel.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> News Release 62-1-11-66-ESF-JD, 1. BGCA 14-1-7.

<sup>31</sup> We are victims to a major weakness, *Baptist Times*, November 3, 1966, 2.

<sup>32</sup> Missions Advanced Research and Communication Center, That Every Man May Hear ... no page nb. BGCA 14-2-4.

Bob Pierce, President and Founder of World Vision, together with vice president of World Vision Ted W. Engstrom, forced a new computer-based evangelism on the conference agenda that went far beyond the traditional use of mass media, such as radio, discussed by delegates from developing countries. Computers should not just be used to enhance the communication between missionaries around the world, but also to calculate future missionary goals and obstacles. Pierce and Engstrom presented PERT, a system used in the aerospace industry, to the delegates as the future computer-supported research tool on global evangelism.<sup>33</sup>

“That every man may hear” and in particular Pierce and Engstrom’s presentations at the congress displayed the ease with which US evangelicalism shifted between past and future, tradition and vision. In the words of the observing *New York Times* correspondent John Cogley: “If the methods strike Europeans as futuristic, the theology proclaimed is, by and large, steadfastly opposed to the spirit of the times, in the view of some observers.”<sup>34</sup> Western representatives in particular neither commented on the important social transformations taking place at the same time nor did they really engage with contemporary trends in Western theology. The ongoing discussion about liberal Christianity, the demythologization of the Gospel, and hermeneutics countered the Congress only with a stern commitment to fundamentalist Protestant Christianity.

The American language of modern business and planning contrasted this conservative theological and political subtext of the congress and challenged not just secular observers. European participants seemed as alienated by the US visions of modern evangelicalism as the delegates from outside the Western world. The British Baptist Brian Gilbert captured the

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<sup>33</sup> Ted W. Engstrom, ‘The Use of Technology. A Vital Tool That Will Help’. In: *One Race, One Gospel. One Task.*, Vol. 2, 315-318. See also: Missions Advanced Research and Communication Center, That Every Man May Hear ... no page nb. BGCA 14-2-4.

<sup>34</sup> Evangelical Parley Denounces Liberal Protestants’ Doctrines, *New York Times*, October 29, 1966, 29. This is also one of the main observations in Martin’s account of the Berlin Congress: Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 329.

fracture running through the congress, pointing to the US organizers on the one end, while “on the other end of such modern assistance comes the vital words of an Asian delegate who said: ‘Evangelism is still the proclamation of the Gospel through me.’”.<sup>35</sup>

Hand in hand with the American commitment to individual salvation and the business of evangelism went the political convictions that the American organizers displayed at Berlin. Firmly embedded in the “spiritual-industrial complex” and the fight against communism at home, the American organizers inscribed their particular involvement in the culture of the Cold War at home into the setting of the world congress. Neo-evangelicals in the United States had manifested their new position in US political culture after 1945 through their move into public political spaces, such as the Billy Graham Crusade held outside the Capitol in Washington DC in 1952, and their participation in civil religious rituals such as prayer breakfasts in Congress. They embraced and fueled the discourse surrounding the Christian nation in its defined opposition to atheist communism and took this message through their missionaries to the outposts of the Free World.<sup>36</sup>

That is why the choice of the divided city of Berlin as the conference venue arose early suspicions and the *New York Times* inquired with the organizer Carl Henry if the city had been chosen for political reasons.<sup>37</sup> Even though Henry denied that, arguing that the organizers had considered other cities as well such as Rome and Copenhagen, West-Berlin

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<sup>35</sup> World Evangelism under Review, *Baptist Times*, November 17, 1966, 2.

<sup>36</sup> Very stimulating studies have been recently published on the role of religion and US evangelicalism in particular during the Cold War: Jonathan Herzog, *The Spiritual Industrial Complex: America's Religious Battle against Communism in the Early Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Jason W. Stevens, *God-Fearing and Free. A Spiritual History of America's Cold War* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2010). See also the earlier work: Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991). None of these, however, have addressed the question of America's spiritual Cold War abroad. Those studies on religion and Cold War diplomacy tend to ignore the important cultural narratives underpinning the spiritual Cold War: Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy*; Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Knopf, 2012). This is also the case for: Philip E. Muehlenbeck, *Religion and the Cold War. A Global Perspective* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press 2012); Dianne Kirby, ed., *Religion and the Cold War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>37</sup> Evangelists Plan Meeting in Berlin: Major Congress Expected to Draw 1,200 Persons, *New York Times*, January 16, 1966, 81.

indeed played an important role in US evangelical Cold War imagination and was chosen for its political symbolism, as Billy Graham later revealed in his autobiography.<sup>38</sup> Billy Graham had preached in the divided city in 1954, 1960, and would do so in 1966 in the week preceding the world congress. In 1960 he had erected his revival tent right behind the Brandenburg Gate; an image transported back to the US by television cameras. In his foreword to the conference publication, Graham called Berlin again a “symbol of freedom and democracy”.<sup>39</sup>

The spatial arrangement of the congress indeed reflected Cold War realities and power relations. In 1966 the BGEA mouthpiece *Decision* commented accordingly on Henry’s decision to invite the delegates to Berlin: “He put them in an American-designed building in a German metropolis, surrounded by Russian barbed wire.”<sup>40</sup> The hyper-modern Berlin congress hall was a shiny example for the fact that the Cold War was also a competition between different concepts of modernity. Built in 1956/57 based on an initiative of Eleanor Dulles the building came to symbolize the United States financial and architectural commitment to the Free City of Berlin. The building was called the “lighthouse of freedom” and was designed to reflect Western values. To make these values seen in the Eastern part of the divided city, the building was set on an artificial hill.<sup>41</sup> The ultra-modern building provided the perfect architectural frame for the efficient, tech-savvy, and modern version of US neo-evangelicalism which was obviously the driving force behind the congress. It also provided the background for media images that showed the evangelical delegates stepping in and out of the building, locating their mission visually in the imagination of the Free World.

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<sup>38</sup> Graham, *Just as I am*, 562.

<sup>39</sup> Billy Graham, ‘Torchbearers for Christ’. In: *One Race, One Gospel, One Task*, Vol.1, 1-2, 1.

<sup>40</sup> The Wheat was High, *Decision*, January 1967, 8-9, 8.

<sup>41</sup> Emily Pugh, *Architecture, Politics, and Identity in Divided Berlin* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014).

Berlin as a divided city featured prominently in the planning and experience of the congress. The congress programme advertised not just a tour through the Western part of the city scheduled for Friday, October 28<sup>th</sup>, but also a tour of East Berlin for the following day.<sup>42</sup> Information for the press corps highlighted the Berlin Wall as “the most photographed place in this city”<sup>43</sup> and encouraged a visit. This clearly confirmed the organizers’ interest to have the Cold War iconography of the Wall included in the press coverage of the congress. Behind the scenes, the congress organizers had toyed with an even bolder idea to take their mission to the Eastern bloc and had discussed the opportunity of an excursion to Wittenberg in the GDR to hold a special service there on Reformation Day.<sup>44</sup> The fact that the trip was kept confidential shows that the organizers were aware of the political tensions surrounding their chosen venues for the Reformation day trip and the Congress in general, but they nevertheless were willing to challenge Cold War realities. In the end, however, they had to give up on the idea of a trip to Luther’s hometown.

Through the choice of the conference venue, the business-like running and rhetoric of the congress, and the commitment to technological progress and personal salvation, the US organizers gave the congress its strikingly American image. The Congress Hall symbolized this as much as every chartered Pan Am jet that brought most of the delegates to Berlin. Every key feature of contemporary national US evangelicalism at home, its anti-communism as much as its commitment to industrial capitalism, was forcefully displayed in Berlin. But the American organizers also staged their global visions, experiences, and knowledge.

## **Global Secular Challenges**

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<sup>42</sup> Program of the World Congress on Evangelism. Schedule, 16. BGCA 14-2-6.

<sup>43</sup> Memo to World Congress Press Staff, September 30, 1966, 3. BGCA 14-2-1.

<sup>44</sup> World Congress on Evangelism. Executive Committee, New York City, December 14, 1965, 3. BGCA 313-2-36.

The American organizers brought their evangelical commitment to technological progress, modern capitalism, and spiritual individualism to Berlin. At the World Congress, however, they had to position their traditional national evangelical identity in relation to the secular challenges of a rapidly globalizing world. During the World Congress, the US evangelical organizers defined their global vision and leadership claims in the context of contemporary debates about population growth, development policies, and the global spread of communism. At the same time they interpreted those challenges within an evangelical framework. They communicated these core convictions through lectures, symbols, and performances in which delegates from other parts of the world participated.

One of the pressing secular challenges to the globe, introduced in the opening remarks by Billy Graham, was the increase in world population that featured prominently in contemporary scientific and political debates in the mid-1960s. The question had forcefully entered the evangelical discourse and mindset in the mid-1960s, exemplified by a special issue by *Christianity Today* on “Evangelizing the earth” published in preparation of the World Congress in April 1966.<sup>45</sup> Graham referred in his opening remarks to the racial and ethnic tensions that might be rising as a direct consequence of rapid population growth. But instead of addressing the severe economic and social consequences experienced in countries such as India, Graham only called for more missionary activities. As he noted, “Evangelism has social implications, but its primary thrust is the winning of men to a personal relationship to Jesus Christ.”<sup>46</sup> Many congress delegates addressed the topic according to the framework defined by Graham. For them, an increase in population mattered primarily in relation to world-wide conversion rates and to what Muri Thompson, evangelist from New Zealand,

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<sup>45</sup> Evangelizing the Earth, *Christianity Today*, April 29, 1966, Vol. X, Nb. 15.

<sup>46</sup> Billy Graham, ‘Why the Berlin Congress’. In: *One Race, One Gospel, One Task*, Vol. 1, 22-34, 24.



called “Christianity’s desperate manpower shortage”<sup>47</sup> compared to the rapid increase in people who had to be reached.

The American congress organizers established this particular view on world population in their statement papers, but even more so through a 30-foot high digital clock that was set up in the lobby of the congress building. The ticking of the clock reminded delegates of the birth of a new baby, 150 per minute, who would have to be reached and converted to Christianity. Under the quickly changing digits, a sign revealed data about the relationship between church growth and population growth, reminding delegates who passed through the lobby, “that the population of the planet was growing ten times faster than Christianity”<sup>48</sup>.

The American conference organizers were aware of the strong symbolism of the clock whose display, in their own words, “preached a sermon every second (...)”.<sup>49</sup> The clock did so not just with regard to population growth, but it also preached the gospel of the organization and discipline of Western civilization and industrial Capitalism.<sup>50</sup> The clock indeed became a central feature of the congress and images show delegates gathering in front of the massive display, which gave them their evangelical marching orders, for photo shots.<sup>51</sup> In these photos they took the message of the clock home. Other participants experienced the clock as a signifier of the urgency of their mission “‘That horrible ticking!’ exclaimed one English brother. ‘It makes you want to put your hands to your ears. So many, many, many unreached for Christ!’”<sup>52</sup> Another Mexican delegate observed: “That clock has a message that is getting through to me.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Muri Thompson, ‘An Hour for Mobilization’. In: *One Race, One Gospel, One Task*, Vol. 1, 367-369, 367.

<sup>48</sup> Martin, *Prophet with Honor*, 329.

<sup>49</sup> Press Release 53-31-10-EO-NR. BGCA 14-1-7.

<sup>50</sup> For the relationship between time and Western modernity see: E.P. Thompson, ‘Time, work-discipline and industrial capitalism’, *Past & Present* 38(1), 1967, 56–97.

<sup>51</sup> *Decision*, January 1967, 10.

<sup>52</sup> The Wheat was High, *Decision*, January 1967, 8-9, and 12, 12. See also images 9.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

Hence, the clock allowed delegates from abroad to experience the urgency of the conviction established by the US organizers that increase in world population was primarily a missionary challenge. The atmosphere of urgency created by the constant ticking of the clock was also a reminiscence of US evangelicalism's strong premillennial tradition. With the end of the world looming, evangelicals were running out of time in converting souls.<sup>54</sup> In the ticking of the clock the call to mission, secular fears of population growth, and traditional millennial urgency blended in a uniquely American way and were communicated to the delegates participating from other parts of the world.

The US organizers chose an even more impressive performance to position themselves within contemporary debates about development and modern civilization in the context of the global Cold War.<sup>55</sup> American evangelical missionaries had been trapped for nearly a century in US imperial dreams and visions and looked back on a long commitment to civilizing missions abroad.<sup>56</sup> In the context of the new Cold War order these civilizing missions took on the meaning of spreading Western, capitalist values and mirrored and reinforced the Cold War Gospel of modernity abroad.<sup>57</sup> The American missionaries' commitment to Western modernity was well reflected in the hyper-modern setting of the congress and the ticking of the population clock, but it was performed in its global context in the spectacle surrounding the two Ecuadorian Auca Indians who participated in the congress.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> On the role of premillennial fears in the development of US evangelicalism: Matthew Sutton, *American Apocalypse. A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2014).

<sup>55</sup> For the historical context see: Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006); David C. Engerman et al, eds., *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press 2003).

<sup>56</sup> See Heather Curtis' article in this special issue.

<sup>57</sup> Stanley, *Global Diffusion*, 64.

<sup>58</sup> Auca is the exonym term for Huao Indians used during the conference and in most future publications. I decided to use it here as well to avoid confusion.

Both Auca Indians, Kimo and Komi, had travelled to Berlin with their translator and chaperon Rachel Saint of Wycliffe. They represented a tribe that had murdered five American Christian missionaries in January 1956, among them Rachel Saint's brother Nate. The story of the mission to the Aucas and the Christian martyrs held a firm place in the US post-1945 imagination as it was "perhaps the most highly publicized missionary story of twentieth-century American Protestantism".<sup>59</sup> The murder had been discussed not just in the religious and daily press, but also in publications such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Readers' Digest*. The story of the five missionaries, their youth, savvy use of air travel and camera equipment, had back in the 1950s told the story of a new modernized Christian mission and missionary identity. The missionaries' sacrifice was interpreted by the press as an ultimate Christian as well as an American commitment to a civilizing mission in competition to the Soviet Union. As Kathryn T. Long observed: "In contrast to Huao savagery, these young men and their wives exemplified American missionary idealism, the postwar idealism that encompassed evangelicals and humanitarian workers alike"<sup>60</sup>.

With the arrival of two members of the Auca tribe in Berlin the American congress organizers could tie into the imagery and narrative of this sacrificial, civilizing, and enthusiastic Cold War mission. Their press release boasted: "The Aucas have leaped from the Stone Age onto the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from the primitive life of not experiencing teaching and learning to the common experience of seeing things, learning to listen, to read, and then to teach".<sup>61</sup> Through their participation in the World Congress on Evangelism, the two Indians made once again headline news around the world.<sup>62</sup> The articles commented on the smart

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<sup>59</sup> Kathryn T. Long, 'In the Modern World but Not of It: The 'Auca Martyrs,' Evangelicalism, and Postwar American Culture'. In: Daniel H. Bays and Grant Wacker, eds., *The Foreign Missionary Enterprise at Home* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 223-236, 224.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 229.

<sup>61</sup> Press Release 33-29-10-6-LW, 2. BGCA 14-1-7.

<sup>62</sup> Miss Saint among the Hunters, *The Guardian*, November 12, 1966, 4; Evangelists Plan Meeting in Berlin: Major Congress Expected to Draw 1,200 Persons, *New York Times*; January 16, 1966, 81; Ecuador Indian Now a Christian, *Washington Post*, October 30, 1966, B7.

appearance of the Indians in suits and shoes who had for the first time entered the “civilized world”<sup>63</sup>. An emblematic image showed them outside the underground station Kurfuerstendamm. Both, image and the related texts, clearly celebrated the civilizing power of Christian mission. The congress performed that narrative when both Indians were interviewed on the congress stage by George M. Cowan. In reply to the question: “What would you have done before you were Christian if someone had done what you consider quite wrong?” Kimo stated: “Before, we just lived like animals. They would long since have lain dead.”<sup>64</sup>

A British observer captured the emotionally intense atmosphere shared by the participants when the Aucas entered the congress hall: “A shock both of reality and promise. (...) The congress rose instinctively with suppressed excitement and immediately the gangways were choked with amateur photographers trying to get near the front.”<sup>65</sup> It was as though delegates bonded over the ultimate possibilities of Christian mission displayed in front of them. But even in this joint bonding experience, the hierarchies seemed unchanged as the British observer continued that everyone present agreed “that one was participating in an American sacramental occasion.”<sup>66</sup> The display of the civilizing power of Christian mission was perceived as quintessentially American. Five American missionaries had sacrificed their lives and now the murderers and the American hosts came to terms with the events of ten years ago.

American evangelical commitment to mission and civilization abroad had for years developed hand in hand with a strong anti-communism.<sup>67</sup> When the Berlin congress

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<sup>63</sup> Evangelists Plan Meeting in Berlin: Major Congress Expected to Draw 1,200 Persons, *New York Times*, January 16, 1966, 81. For the tradition of the display of tribal people at missionary conferences see: Erin Hasinoff, *Faith in Objects: American missionary Expositions in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>64</sup> The Faith of Kimo, *Decision*, March 1967, 3. The BGCA published the audio tape of the press conference: <http://espace.wheaton.edu/bgc/audio/cn014t09a.mp3>

<sup>65</sup> Aucas visit Berlin Congress, *Church of England Newspaper*, November 11, 1966, 3 & 13, 13.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ruble, *Gospel of Freedom and Power*, 55-90.

discussed the threat of a world wide spread of communism, American evangelicals could bring in the harvest. With their choice of the conference venue, the American organizers had already positioned themselves in the heart of the Cold War conflict. Yet none of them articulated the problem of a world-wide spread of communism in their main speeches. Carl Henry was afraid that a strong anti-communist rhetoric could distract delegates from focusing on the Gospel as he admitted in an interview with the *New York Times*.<sup>68</sup>

The missionary commitment to an anti-communist Free World, however, echoed now from the remarks of the participants who had lived on the receiving end of American missionary campaigns. Delegates from Asia, South America, and Africa such as Reverend Nicholas B. H Bhengu, founder of the Back to God Crusade in South Africa, and Ben Wati, executive secretary of The Evangelical Fellowship of India, joined in warnings against the spread of Communism.<sup>69</sup> Helen Kim, president of the Upper Room Evangelistic Association and former ambassador for Korea to the United Nations dedicated her entire remarks to the discussion of the problem between the totalitarian threat to Christian life in the Soviet Union, China and Korea. And, predictably, Andrew Ben Loo – the South-East Asian representative of The Pocket Testament League, Inc. from Taipei – also warned of evils of Communism in his paper on “Communism and Christianity”.<sup>70</sup>

Both papers show how much the American discourse on Christianity and Communism had penetrated the mindsets and rhetoric of evangelicals around the globe. Whilst Billy Graham had declared in 1949 in Los Angeles that “Communism is not only an economic interpretation of life – Communism is a religion that is inspired, directed, and

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<sup>68</sup> Religion: A Rally of the Evangelist, *New York Times*, November 6, 1966, 26. There might have well been other reasons for the Western and US speakers to down tune their anti-Communist message: the Vietnam War, an example of anti-Communist fears turned into action, was about to split the western Christian community. Billy Graham had received sharp criticism for his public support for the war during his campaign work in Europe in 1966.

<sup>69</sup> See the reports from different country representatives published in the section ‘Windows on the World’. In: *One Race, One Gospel, One Task*, Vol. 2, 163-288.

<sup>70</sup> Helen Kim, ‘Communist Opposition to Evangelism’. In: *One Race, One Gospel, One Task*, Vol. 1, 291-293; Andrew Ben Loo, ‘Communism and Christianity’, *ibid.*, 294-297.

motivated by the Devil himself who has declared war against Almighty God”<sup>71</sup>, Andrew Ben Loo now referred to the ideology “a satanic religion which endeavors to enslave not only man’s body but also his soul.”<sup>72</sup> Helen Kim echoed the conviction Graham had emphasized again and again that only Christianity can strengthen a society against Communist infiltration by saying: “Only by righteous Christian lives can we overcome the economic, and political problems that make men susceptible to Communist offers.”<sup>73</sup>

The symbolic power of the population clock and the spectacle surrounding the Auca Indians underlines the cultural dominance of US evangelicalism at the Berlin congress. The discussion about the world-wide spread of communism, highlights as well how much US evangelicals influenced evangelical culture abroad. And yet, Kim’s and Loo’s presentations should not be mistaken as representing all non-Western evangelical opinion. After all, both came from exposed frontline, divided states in the battle against communism. Thus both were particularly attuned to the threat of communism and the protection offered by America’s ‘spiritual-industrial’ (and, one might add, military) complex. Indeed, the real significance of the congress lies in the many ways in which this cultural dominance became questioned, in how new factions formed, and how a transnational evangelical community developed around new voices and new friendships that formed bottom up.

### **Conversations and Fractions**

While the keynote lectures, position papers, and the orchestration of the congress reflected and confirmed the cultural dominance of US evangelicalism, the atmosphere in the

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<sup>71</sup> Billy Graham, ed., *Revival in Our Time. The Story of the Billy Graham evangelistic campaigns*, (Van Kampen Press, Wheaton, IL, 1950), 124.

<sup>72</sup> Loo, *Communism and Christianity*, 294.

<sup>73</sup> Kim, *Communist Opposition to Evangelism*, 293.

many discussion groups hinted at the dawning of a new era in global Christianity. Russell T. Hitt, editor of the Philadelphia based *Eternity* magazine, summarized his experience in the groups: “Some of the discussion groups have been extremely creative. Many participants have been re-evaluating their attitude to their brethren”.<sup>74</sup> In fact, these discussion groups were set up by the organizers as realms in which hegemonic positions should be openly questioned and challenged. Conference bulletins and programme information encouraged participants to voice their concerns and disagreements in an honest and respectful way to stimulate a genuine spiritual and intellectual exchange. The programme information specifically asked delegates: “Use the discussion sessions as a time to open your heart.”<sup>75</sup>

The published conference proceedings allow a glimpse of the atmosphere in the discussion groups. Often observers commented on the animated, dynamic, and open conversation and exchanges, but there were also moments of strong emotions reported.<sup>76</sup> After a presentation on black and white nationalism in South Africa which clearly represented the English speaking population’s point of view, Afrikaans delegates even asked to have the paper excluded from the proceedings. Emotions run high, but after “tense, frank and open disagreement and a sharp clash of opposing opinions (...) the hour closed with an African tribute to the power of Christian love to break through all and any barriers that rampant nationalism can erect against the free flow of the Gospel.”<sup>77</sup> Discussions reportedly continued after the session time had officially run out and “many lingered afterwards to carry on the serious nature of these matters which had been brought to the attention of the delegates.”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> The Wheat was High, *Decision*, January 1967, 8-9, and 12, 12.

<sup>75</sup> Program and Information, 6. BGCA 14-2-6. See also: Stanley Mooneyham, Congress Bulletin Memo to all Participants, section II. BGCA 14-2-1.

<sup>76</sup> E.g. ‘Report of Group Discussion’. In: *One Race, One Gospel, One Task*, Vol. 2, 191-193, 193.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 205-206 and 316-317.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 191-193, 193.

The discussion groups were willing to touch on core convictions of evangelical faith such as the question of a possibility of eternal life without the personal experience of Jesus triggered by a converted Jew whose parents had died in the Holocaust before being converted. The room immediately split between those pointing out that hardship might be considered as a path to heaven and others – such as the American delegate D. James Kennedy of Fort Lauderdale – who emphasized that the only hope was through personal experience with Jesus.<sup>79</sup> In the end, delegates departed with a compromise: “There seemed complete unanimity at one point-that man has a soul-that it can be won or lost for eternity, that the greatest work man could ever do is to seek to win as many as possible to faith in Jesus Christ.”<sup>80</sup> This summary allows a glance into the everyday atmosphere at the Congress; it highlights the existence of tensions around core convictions, and it manifested to evangelicals the need to find an inclusive consensus which could defy dogma in search for common denominators acceptable worldwide. In the process, delegates from developing countries could make their mark on route to a future leadership role in world evangelism as the Jamaican Bishop Gibson who provided a theologically based compromise in a controversial discussion about baptism.<sup>81</sup>

In the discussion groups the global leadership role of US evangelicalism was exposed and the authenticity of US evangelicalism openly criticized. Delegates attacked the Western “secular type of Christianity”<sup>82</sup> that was stricken with sexual relationships before and outside marriages, the abuse of alcohol and drugs, as well as the worship of money. The Anglican Bishop Reverent Dr. Ray of Karachi, Pakistan, defined the low reputation of Western Christianity in his country as a main obstacle to world evangelism.<sup>83</sup> African and Africa-

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 191-193, 192.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 191-193, 193.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 246-247, 246.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 37.

<sup>83</sup> Chandu Ray, ‘The Religions of Asia’. In: *One Race, One Gospel, One Task*, Vol. 2, 285-286, 285.



based delegates, such as Howard Jones from Liberia, warned that Western missionaries in Africa had unintentionally stirred “materialist aspirations”<sup>84</sup>, spreading the Gospel of capitalism more forcefully than that of Salvation. African delegates in particular challenged Western positions of racial self-containment and shared their personal experiences of racial discrimination in the discussion groups. They urged Western evangelical leaders to overcome racist paternalism, lest Africa falls in the hands of Islam.<sup>85</sup> That the American evangelical image suffered in Africa due to the racial tensions at home became clear when Moses Aiye from Nigeria denied white US missionaries to Africa the right to speak of Christ’s love as long as Nigerian exchange students were discriminated in the US due to the colour of their skin.<sup>86</sup>

These discussions of missionary materialism and racism reflected a similar debate in US evangelical circles at home. Sarah Ruble highlights a series of articles published in *Christianity Today* in 1964, in which leading voices from the evangelical camp openly criticized the cultural and racial hubris of their missionaries which often reflected their unhealthy complicity with the many different layers of “Western power”<sup>87</sup>. Ruble shows how discussions about missionaries’ conduct and experiences abroad informed the evangelical discourse about Civil Rights at home. This very close entanglement between global and local experiences with regard to racism and imperialism can also be witnessed during the Berlin Congress, which hence deserves a place in the international history of the Civil Rights movement.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Henry, *Evangelicals*, 77.

<sup>85</sup> ‘Report of Group Discussion’. In: *One Race, One Gospel, One Task*, Vol. 2, 205-206 and 286-287. Most of the presentations by Western delegates, in particular the European ones, ignored the question of race and racism entirely.

<sup>86</sup> News Release 69-1-11-66-NAL-JN, 2. BGCA 14-1-7.

<sup>87</sup> Ruble, *Gospel of Freedom and Power*, 66-68.

<sup>88</sup> See eg. Nicholas Grant, ‘Crossing the Black Atlantic: The Global Anti-Apartheid Movement and the Racial Politics of the Early Cold War’. *Radical History Review*, 2014 (119), 72-93.

The African delegates were joined in their open criticism by African-American representatives who used the congress to come to terms with racial discrimination they had again and again witnessed and experienced at home. For them in particular, the question of race touched on another core conviction of the congress and that was the question of the relationship between evangelism and social change. William E. Pannell, African-American evangelist and member of the executive staff of Youth for Christ International made a forceful plea for social change as an important responsibility of evangelicals: “But being an evangelical (..), has meant, at least in my lifetime, not only passivity in social matters, but also, by default, a tacit support of the status quo.”<sup>89</sup> He now called for a stronger involvement of Christians in active challenges to the social order.

That African-American delegates brought the US Civil Rights discourse with them to Berlin became even more obvious when Louis Johnson, a Baptist minister from Detroit, called the idea that Christian faith could be the answer to the world’s racial tensions “hypocritical”. He pointed out that for a very long time Christians had failed to live up to the commandment of brotherly love due to racial prejudices. Instead he called for an active campaign against institutionalized racism manifested in segregated housing and education.<sup>90</sup> From this plea echoed a conflict that had challenged and split the US evangelical milieu during the Civil Right years, namely the responsibilities of state vs. individuals or churches for bringing segregation to an end. In short: was the evangelicals’ first and foremost responsibility the commitment to winning souls for Christ or actively changing societal structures? Billy Graham’s own position reflects the many different ways in which white evangelicals contributed and simultaneously hindered progress towards racial and social justice. On the one hand Graham publicly displayed a deep skepticism towards state

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<sup>89</sup> William E. Pannell, ‘Spiritual Needs of the Negro’. In: *One Race, One Gospel, One Task*, Vol. 2, 376-380, 376. See also: ‘Evangelism and Race’ In: *One Race, One Gospel, One Task*, Vol. 2, 523-524.

<sup>90</sup> News Release 69-1-11-66-NAL-JN, 1. BGCA 14-1-7.

centered solutions such as the Civil Rights Act and announced several times that social change could only be gained through personal salvation. On the other hand, he still showed a personal commitment towards social progress in desegregating his Southern audiences as early as 1953.<sup>91</sup>

Like in the US evangelical milieu, the question of race and racism clearly split the Congress in opposing camps. After an evening address of Richard C. Halverson, one delegate observed that white participants had only applauded when he had talked about Christian love, “but there was a suffocating, eloquent silence when he spoke about racial prejudice.”<sup>92</sup> In particular delegates from the majority world bonded over their shared experience of racism from the hands of Western missionaries. They also used the group discussions to jointly campaign for a better understanding of unique cultural patterns and spiritual problems in their countries. The congress’s final declaration, which acknowledged the failure of many evangelicals in the past regarding racism and made a strong plea for racial understanding, marked a tremendous success for the delegates from the majority world.<sup>93</sup> Evangelicals from Africa, Asia and Latin America had made their increasing influence in world evangelism felt, a fact noted with much empathy by *The Washington Post* special correspondent Katherine Clark.<sup>94</sup> This new weight indicated one of the major shifts that took place in world evangelism in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which clearly set the Berlin Congress apart from earlier international gatherings such as the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910 or the founding conference of the World Council of Churches in 1948 at which

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<sup>91</sup> Steven P. Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009). And: Randall J. Stephens, “‘It has to come from the hearts of the people’: Evangelicals, Fundamentalists, Race, and the 1964 Civil Rights Act”, *Journal of American Studies*, published online, 18 May 2015. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0021875815000687>

<sup>92</sup> News Release 69-1-11-66-NAL-JN, 2. BGCA 14-1-7.

<sup>93</sup> ‘One Race, One Gospel, One Task. Closing Statement of the World Congress on Evangelism’. In: *One Race, One Gospel, One Task*, Vol. 1, 5-7.

<sup>94</sup> Racism Is Denounced At Evangelism Parley: Raised Racism Issue Fr. Sheerin Impressed, *Washington Post*, November 5, 1966, C7.

voices from the majority world were merely present.<sup>95</sup> Only nineteen delegates out of 1,250 at Edinburgh represented the majority world which confirmed a clear lack of “indigenous representation”<sup>96</sup>. Remarkably, those delegates already addressed some of the issues that would break through the surface in Berlin 56 years later. They questioned existing cultural and social hierarchies as well as underlying racism in the mission field and addressed their hope for administrative and theological self-determination.<sup>97</sup> Yet still, it would need the process of decolonization as well as the rise of an international Civil Rights movement to turn the tide in their favour.

At Berlin, reports from the discussion groups clearly show that US racism at home and abroad as well as the gospel of individual conversion as the main goal of evangelism were no longer unanimously accepted. In his post-congress publication “Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis”, a title that captured the urgency of the Berlin meeting, Carl Henry acknowledged that the congress “(...) reflected significant divisions within the evangelical community touching Christian responsibility at some of the major frontiers of contemporary social concern.”<sup>98</sup> He used the publication, however, to affirm again the position that social change and human rights were not the primary concern of world evangelism. He acknowledged the importance of human commitment to social justice but returned to the statement he had made on the opening day of the congress that personal conversion had to come first.<sup>99</sup>

Despite those open conflicts and tensions the discussion groups were important fora for transnational exchange. The conference in general was a realm full of shared bonding experiences for the delegates. They all heard the population clock ticking, they jointly held

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<sup>95</sup> Stanley, *World Missionary Conference*, 91; Visser ‘t Hoff, *Genesis and Formation*, 63-69.

<sup>96</sup> Stanley, *World Missionary Conference*, 102.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* 91-132.

<sup>98</sup> Carl F.H. Henry, *Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis: Significance of the World Congress on Evangelism* (Waco: World Books, 1967), 56.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* 33-40.

their breath while the Auca Indians gave their testimony, and they marched side by side through the city of Berlin. In joint standing ovations after papers such as the stern defense of Biblical theology against the contemporary critical theology by Professor Johannes Schneider, they positioned themselves as a group in the rough currents of contemporary theological debates.<sup>100</sup> Delegates did not just passively attend sessions but participated actively in the discussion groups and again and again through joint applause they made the congress decisions and declarations “their own”.<sup>101</sup>

These experiences signaled the emergence of a growing global awareness and allowed a new global evangelical community to emerge. Many everyday encounters added to the formation of this community: The organizers encouraged participants to stay in the hotel rooms reserved and assigned through the conference office to make sure that delegates found additional opportunities to meet, talk, and form fellowships over breakfast tables and in transfer buses.<sup>102</sup> Two meals per day were served at the congress hall for the very same reason and cultural sessions scheduled as part of the conference programme provided ample opportunities for bonding during musical and theater performances as well as sightseeing trips.<sup>103</sup>

Indeed, as a British delegate observed, community grew out of personal conversation in particular during casual encounters during meals and those added to the more official exchanges in the discussion groups.<sup>104</sup> It was then that personal conversations revealed shared interests and worries and “the same urge driving strangers forward as drove oneself back home.”<sup>105</sup> An American observer echoed this experience: “Suddenly by the will of God an intangible spiritual bond among believers had been incarnated into a visible and living

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid. 12.

<sup>101</sup> News Release, 87-11-4-66-NAL-TS, 2. BGCA 14-1-7.

<sup>102</sup> Congress Bulletin, July 11, 1966, 2. BGCA 14-2-1.

<sup>103</sup> Program of the World Congress on Evangelism. Schedule, 16. BGCA 14-2-6.

<sup>104</sup> Aucas visit Berlin Congress, *Church of England Newspaper*, November 11, 1966, 3 & 13, 13.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

brotherhood.”<sup>106</sup> The new community formed without a doubt under American leadership, but the everyday encounters between delegates during the congress also showed a Christian community forming bottom up.

In particular the practice of prayer proved to bring delegates from different racial, national, and denominational backgrounds together. Even before the congress began, 250,000 prayer bulletins had been sent out to encourage future delegates and Christians around the world to pray for the event in Berlin. Prayer groups for the congress formed around the world and embedded the congress firmly into the everyday experience of thousands of Christians in different countries. Closely before the opening of the Congress, the official prayer bulletin reported of half-night long prayer events for the congress being held across South Africa.<sup>107</sup> Prayer remained one of the joint practices during the congress. The congress spent the first evening in joint prayer until midnight and the conference programme scheduled prayer cells for every congress day between 7 and 7.30 am.<sup>108</sup> Apart from that many delegates organized their own late night prayer meetings in hotels and bed and breakfasts.<sup>109</sup>

The practice of prayer was also addressed in many presentations by representatives from developing countries which finished their papers with the plea “Pray for us”. When problems seemed overwhelming, delegates such as Isaac Ababio from Nigeria called the delegates to “corporate prayer”. It was prayer that diminished denominational and status boundaries. According to the final news release of the congress: “Now prayer ties have been established by hundreds of delegates, linked now with people they had never known before

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<sup>106</sup> The Wheat was High, *Decision*, January 1967, 8-9, and 12, 12.

<sup>107</sup> Prayer Sweeping World on Behalf of Congress in: World Congress of Evangelism Prayer-News Bulletin, August-September-October 1966, 1. BGCA 14-1-6.

<sup>108</sup> Program of the World Congress on Evangelism. Schedule, 16. BGCA 14-2-6.

<sup>109</sup> Henry, *Confessions*, 260. The importance of prayer at international conferences and exchanges is also addressed in: Stanley, *World Missionary Conference*, 88-90.

the Congress. The prayer ties cut across the scores of denominations represented at the Congress, and unite pastors, theologians, administrators and evangelists.”<sup>110</sup>

Still, even in prayer cultural distinctions remained: Billy Graham, after his final presentation ‘Stains on the Altar’ urged delegates to get down on their knees in the auditorium to pray with him.<sup>111</sup> The moment visually captured the social realities of the congress: “As the pre-dominantly American, masculine, middle-aged group knelt and wept, individual Asians, Africans, and Latin Americans stood and said short prayers in their own languages.”<sup>112</sup> They preserved and proudly displayed their different styles in worship and yet, they became one in Christ through prayer. An image published in *Decision* after the end of the Congress captures the delegates praying in the main auditorium. The captions read: “The Congress ends, as it had begun, with prayer; delegates kneel to give expression to their hopes for spreading the fire – each to his own people in his own land.”<sup>113</sup>

The newly created global evangelical community of congress participants displayed its new identity at the last day of the conference when participants marched down the broad outside staircase of the Berlin congress hall such as they had marched side by side during their first get together during the march of Christian Witness. This time however the imagery had changed and people were not carrying their national flags anymore, but just grabbed the nearest flag that had been disposed along the walls of the congress building. When a German journalist asked a young man from India who carried the flag of Hong Kong how the confusion and mixing of the flags had happened, the man answered: “This doesn’t matter anymore. This is now the one flag of Christ.”<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> News Release, 87-11-4-66-NAL-TS, 5. BGCA 14-1-7.

<sup>111</sup> Billy Graham, ‘Stains on the Altar’ In: *One Race, One Gospel, One Task*, Vol. 2, 151- 160.

<sup>112</sup> Racism Is Denounced At Evangelism Parley: Raised Racism Issue Fr. Sheerin Impressed, *Washington Post*, November 5, 1966, C7.

<sup>113</sup> *Decision*, January 1967, 11.

<sup>114</sup> Eine Menschheit, ein Evangelium, ein Auftrag, *Tagesspiegel*, November 5, 1966, 9.

## **Conclusion**

The World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin marked a high point after two decades of US evangelicalism's grand expansion and was a formative moment in world Christianity. The American organizers displayed and confirmed the cultural dominance of US evangelicalism in the post-War years by defining the theology, rhetoric, and atmosphere of the congress. They did so by staging every single aspect of the congress from setting the tone for the discussion groups to proposing a dress code for the March of Christian Witness. The conference setting provides insights into the different layers of this cultural dominance that included a business-like rigor, a stern anti-communism, and a self-contained commitment to modernity, civilization, and personal salvation. It also allows us to see how US evangelicals interpreted secular global challenges such as population growth and the spread of communism to which they responded with their own civilizing mission.

During the ten days in Berlin, however, a new era in world Christianity dawned. The processes of decolonization did not just stir hopes and needs for new political entities but also for new religious identities and alliances. African and Asian participants attended the congress with new confidence, challenged the American spiritual leadership role, and openly addressed problems of racial discrimination, poverty, and war. The first voices could be heard that asked for an evangelism that also brought development aid and social change. With the shifting political power relations on the global scale, the theological leadership position of the Western world also became contested. More than that, in Berlin started a trend that would



mark the reality of 21<sup>st</sup> century global evangelicalism: African and Asian delegates were now considered by the Western organizers as “missionaries to us”.<sup>115</sup>

The question of race stood in the center of the fiercest controversies that took place at the congress. White US evangelicals had often been attacked at home for their too reluctant position toward desegregation and the civil rights movement. Their African-American brethren now brought the new discourse of the Christian civil rights activists, who had seamlessly tied religion to social change, with them to Berlin. They were joined by African delegates who openly accused white US missionaries of racial paternalism and gave the problem a global and Cold War dimension: those who wanted to represent the free world abroad would have to sort out freedom at home first. The final declaration of the congress that reads as a Western confession of guilt regarding racism confirmed the shifting power relations in world evangelism. Clearly, the first cracks in a global evangelical community under US leadership had occurred. Those would widen over the next eight years before the global evangelical community would gather again in Lausanne.

Despite the rising tensions and the contested US leadership position, the congress provided an important forum for a global evangelical community to grow. In contrast to the often bilateral encounter in the mission field or the exchange networks of international evangelical organizations, congresses constituted genuine fora of global experience. Delegates had travelled together, prayed together, and they participated together in the different congress events. Taking the everyday of the congress atmosphere into consideration explains why the ideal of a global evangelical community survived the growing theological and political tensions. The practices of bonding such as prayer and the experience of a shared faith proved stronger and more formative than conflicts and fractions. Future research on

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<sup>115</sup> Press Release 35-30-10-66-NAL, 3. BGCA 14-1-7.

religious conferences and congresses should take this everyday dimension further into consideration and aim to capture as well the experience of the many cultural performances, such as music and theatre, taking place during the meeting. The more we are able to capture the everyday, cultural, and emotional dimensions of the congress, the better we are able to understand what made participation in the congress such a liminal experience for all delegates.

Transnational history has moved world exhibitions and scientific congresses into the center of a cultural history of globalization. Religious congresses as well deserve a place in this historiography. In many respects, they functioned similar to secular international gatherings and yet, they were significantly different. Several layers make religious gatherings such as the World Congress on evangelism unique: the Congress was marked by a very distinct emotional atmosphere. The delegates' often expressed feeling of urgency can only be explained by the premillennialist tradition of US and world evangelicalism for whom the nearing of the end of the world was part of their reality. The transnational practice of prayer with its many personal, cultural, and spiritual dimensions that connected delegates before, during, and after the World Congress on evangelism also marked a rather unique way of international connectedness. But despite their uniqueness, these congresses not just deserve a place in the global history of US evangelicalism, but even more so in a general history of globalization which until today is marked by significant religious dimensions and ramifications.\*

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